

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks to General Motors Employees in Lordstown, Ohio
September 15, 2009

Thank you. Thank you, Lordstown. Thank you. Thank you, guys. It is good to be back in Ohio. And it's good to be at one of GM's flagship plants with all of you.

I've got a list of some wonderful people that I want to make sure I acknowledge real quick. First of all, a former colleague of mine, somebody who is now collaborating with me to make sure that working people are getting a fair shake in this country, please give it up for your United States Senator Sherrod Brown—where's Sherrod?—there he is; your Congressman, doing an outstanding job, great young man, Tim Ryan; from the neighboring congressional district, somebody who is responsible for Cash for Clunkers, Betty Sutton; and an outstanding Congressman from Ohio as well, Charlie Wilson—give Charlie a big round of applause.

We've got a great trio of mayors here: Mayor Michael O'Brien of Warren, Michael Chaffee of Lordstown, and Mayor Jay Williams of Youngstown—give them all a big round of applause. We've got State Senator and Minority Leader Capri Cafaro is here. How are you? She's a fireplug. I remember her.

The CEO of General Motors, Fritz Henderson, is in the house; plant manager John Donahue is in the house; UAW servicing agent John Mohan is in the house; president of the UAW Local 1112 Jim Graham's in the house; president of Local 1714 David Green is in the house; chairperson of 1112 Ben Strickland; and chairperson of Local 1714 Will Adams.

Well, listen, I just finished having a productive discussion with some of your coworkers about the challenges you're facing, both here and in your communities, and how we can meet them. We talked about the economic troubles that you've been weathering here in Trumbull County since long before our current crisis. Yes, if you've got chairs, go ahead, feel free to sit down. *[Laughter]* You don't have to stand this whole time.

But let's face it, we've been going through some crises since before this economic crisis—this financial crisis hit. Over the years, you've seen factories close. You've seen friends and neighbors and relatives laid off. Your daughters and sons have had to move away in search of jobs and opportunity. I know it was painful around here earlier this year, when three shifts at this plant were cut down to one. Today, the local unemployment rate is unacceptably high in this region—second-highest in Ohio. So I know at times, it seems like this community has been on the brink, over and over and over again.

And there's some who see this pain and suggest that somehow it's inevitable, that the only way for America to get ahead is for communities like yours to be left behind. But I know better; we know better. We know that our success as a nation depends on the success of communities just like this one. We know that the battle for America's future is not just going to be won in the big cities, not just on the coasts, but in towns like Elkhart, Indiana, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Warren and Youngstown. That's what we're fighting for.

That's why I'm proud to be here with all of you. You work hard. You meet your responsibilities. You deserve better. You deserve better than the attitude that's prevailed in Washington and Wall Street and sometimes in Detroit for far too long, an attitude that valued wealth over work and selfishness over sacrifice and greed over responsibility. That's why I want you to know that every day that I step into the Oval Office, I am thinking about you and your

families, I am fighting for you and your families, and I'm going to keep on doing it as long as I'm President of the United States.

Now, sometimes that involves making tough decisions that have been put off for too long. That's my job: making tough decisions. If it's an easy decision, it doesn't get to my desk. As I've said before, I didn't run for President to manage auto companies. It wasn't something on my to-do list. It wasn't even something on my want-to-do list. *[Laughter]* I like driving cars. *[Laughter]* Sometimes, you know, I can change a spark plug or change a tire, but I don't know so much about cars that I wanted to be deeply involved in the car industry.

But here's what I knew: I wasn't going to put any more tax dollars on the line if it meant perpetuating bad business decisions that got us to a point where the U.S auto industry was in crisis. But in the midst of a deep recession and financial crisis, for me to have just let the auto industry collapse, to vanish, would have caused unbelievable damage to our economy, not just here in Lordstown, but all across the country. So we intervened for one simple and compelling reason: Your survival and the success of our economy depended on making sure that we got the U.S. auto industry back on its feet.

And there were some people who said you can't do it. But our belief was that if GM retooled and reinvented itself for the 21st century, it would be good for American workers, it would be good for American manufacturing, it would be good for America's economy. And I'm pleased to report that that is exactly what has begun to happen at plants like this and others across the country. So I know that some of those decisions may not have been popular, but I will tell you what: I will double down on the American people and the American worker and all of you any day of the week.

Now, one of the other efforts we undertook was the Cash for Clunkers program. Folks said that wouldn't work either. That program was good for automakers, it was good for consumers, and, by the way, it was good for our environment. And you know what? The Chevy Cobalt that you build here was one of GM's most sought-after cars under that program. Dealers across the country started running out. You need to build more.

And one other thing: For too long, our auto industries faced uncertain and conflicting fuel economy standards. And that made it difficult for you to plan down the road. And that's why today we are launching—for the first time in history—a new national standard aimed at both increasing gas mileage and decreasing greenhouse gas pollution for all cars and trucks sold in America. It creates an even playing field. It's an action that is long overdue. It will give our auto companies clarity and stability and predictability.

In the past, an agreement like this would have been impossible, but this time it was different because automakers, the UAW, environmental advocates, Democrats, Republicans, States all across the country, all of them came together, pledging to set aside the quarrels of the past for the sake of the future.

Because of the steps we've taken, this plant is about to shift into high gear. A hundred and fifty of your coworkers came back to work yesterday. More than 1,000 will be coming back to work in less than 3 weeks as production of the Cobalt ramps up. *[Applause]* That's worth standing for.

And next year, this plant will begin production of the Chevy Cruze, a new car that will get more than 40 miles per gallon. I just sat in the car. I asked for the keys; they wouldn't give me the keys. *[Laughter]* I was going to take it for a little spin. *[Laughter]* But it was nice sitting in there. It was a roomy car—40 miles per gallon.

So if you picked up a copy of the Youngstown Vindicator back in January, you would have seen a headline that read: "Worries mount in wake of layoffs." A couple weeks ago, you would have read a different story: "Good news at Lordstown is good news for all." And today you made, by the way, some more good news: I understand that the one-millionth Cobalt rolled off the assembly line late last night.

So I don't want to just congratulate you; I want to thank you. You're doing your part to move us forward and make sure that the high-quality, well-engineered, safe, and fuel-efficient cars of the future will be built where they've always been built, right here in Ohio, right across the Midwest, right here in the United States of America.

Now, even though you're proving that American automakers are getting back in the game, I think everybody understands our economic troubles are far from over. I don't want to overpromise here. We've still got a lot of work to do. We got in a deep hole over a course of years; it's going to take some years to get back out of this hole. We have a lot of work to do not just to get this community moving again and this economy moving again, but we've got to build a stronger foundation for economic growth into the future.

There's some people in Washington, they've already forgotten just what it was that we walked into 8 months ago. So let me just go through—let me go through the facts here real quick in case you all have forgotten: a financial system near collapse; 700,000 workers losing their jobs every single month; a sudden decline in credit that made it difficult to take out a mortgage, or a student loan, or a small business loan, or an auto loan. You couldn't get an auto loan. It was so bad that experts of all political persuasions feared a second coming of the Great Depression.

So we took bold, swift action to make sure that didn't happen. We moved to keep responsible homeowners in their homes. We moved to jump-start lending. We passed a sweeping Recovery Act without the usual Washington earmarks or porkbarrel spending, but putting people back to work. And that plan is now working.

I want you to know what's happened here. One-third of our Recovery Act went to tax relief; we cut your taxes. Ninety-five percent of America's working families—4.5 million families right here in Ohio—we cut your taxes. And we cut taxes for small businesses on investments that they make.

That was a third of our Recovery Act. And that gave everybody a little more money in their pockets to spend, which helped boost the economy. Then what we did was we put another third into emergency relief. All those Americans who were laid off, we extended unemployment benefits, and that's made a difference for 12 million Americans, including 570,000 right here in Ohio.

And for all those people who had lost their jobs, they were worried about losing their health care, they were going to have to try to get on COBRA, but you know how much COBRA costs, having to pick up your whole health care premium. So what we did was we made health insurance through COBRA 65 percent cheaper for families while they were looking for work. We saved the jobs of tens of thousands of State and local workers, including 336 police officers right here in Ohio. That was part of our Recovery Act.

Now, the last third is investing in your towns and your future. Over in Canfield, we awarded a competitive contract to a local company to repair a bridge on Route 11. That allowed them to avoid layoffs they were otherwise going to make. That allowed local folks to keep coming to work, doing the work America needs done. We've got projects like that all

across Ohio and all across the country, rebuilding our roads and our bridges, laying broadband lines, making sure that we're building the wind turbines and solar panels that are going to drive our energy future. That's what the Recovery Act has been all about.

Now, we've still got a long way to go, but there is little debate that the decisions we've made and the steps we've taken helped stop our economic freefall. In some places, they've helped us turn the corner. Home sales are up; business investment is starting to stabilize. For the first time in 18 months, we're actually seeing growth in American manufacturing instead of decline.

I know that's small consolation when so many people you know are still out of work. It's going to take some time to achieve a complete recovery. But I want you to all know, I will not rest until anybody who's looking for a job can find one, and I'm not talking about just any job, but good jobs that give every American decent wages and decent benefits and a fair shot at the American Dream. That's what I'm fighting for every single day.

We're fighting for an America where your children will be armed with the skills they need to compete with any worker, anywhere in the world. We're making a historic commitment to strengthening and improving education from cradle to a career. And I've set a goal: By 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. There's no reason why we can't have that number-one ranking once again.

We're fighting for an America where clean energy generates green jobs that can't be outsourced, that help us free ourselves from our grip of foreign oil; jobs that make sure the cars of the future and the technologies like the new batteries that power them are made right here in the United States of America.

And, yes, just in case you were wondering, we are fighting for an America where no American should have to worry about going without health insurance or feel that one illness could cost them everything they have. We're going to reform the system to provide more security and stability to those of you who have health insurance. We're going to offer quality, affordable choices to those who currently don't have health insurance. And we're going to bring health care costs for our families and our businesses and our Government under control.

Think about it. If you're a member of the union right now, you're spending all your time negotiating about health care. You need to be spending some time negotiating about wages, but you can't do it—[*applause*]*—*but I want to make sure that you understand—you've got to understand Fritz's position here; he's trying to build this company back up. And if health care costs are going up 30 percent or 20 percent every year, it's very tough for him. So we all have an interest in reforming the health care system so that the cost for employers don't go up; that means the cost for you don't go up, and that means you can actually start bringing home a little more take-home pay. That's what this is all about if you've already got health insurance.

So that's what we're fighting for: to bring Lordstown and Youngstown and Warren back; to make sure that our towns and our middle class—a middle class forged just like in plants that you're seeing here—I want them not just to survive today, but to thrive tomorrow.

I want you to deliver a message to the GM team members who are manning the line and couldn't join us today: As long as you've still got an ounce of fight left in you, I've got a ton of fight left in me. I've said it before, I'm skinny, but I'm tough. [*Laughter*] And as long as I have the privilege of being your President, I'm going to keep fighting for a future that is brighter for this community and brighter for Ohio and brighter for the United States of America.

I need your help, so give it to me, guys, because we're going to rebuild right here, right now. We're going to make Ohio work again. Thank you, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:13 a.m. at General Motors Lordstown Assembly Plant. In his remarks, he referred to John Mohan, shop chairman, UAW Local 1112.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : General Motors employees in Lordstown, OH.

Locations: Lordstown, OH.

Names: Adams, Will; Brown, Sherrod; Cafaro, Capri S.; Chaffee, Michael; Donahue, John; Graham, Jim; Green, David; Henderson, Frederick A. "Fritz"; Mohan, John; O'Brien, Michael J.; Ryan, Timothy J.; Strickland, Ben; Sutton, Betty; Williams, Jay; Wilson, Charlie.

Subjects: Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Decline; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: General Motors Corp., bankruptcy of; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Credit freeze situation; Business and industry : Small and minority businesses; Economy, national : American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : American Graduation Initiative, proposed; Education : Global competitiveness; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment insurance; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Carbon dioxide emissions, reduction; Energy : Foreign sources; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Employer-based health insurance coverage; Health and medical care : Health insurance, protection of coverage; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Ohio : President's visits; Ohio : Unemployment rate; Science and technology : Broadband technology; Taxation : Tax relief; Transportation : Highway system, modernization efforts; Transportation, Department of : CAR Allowance Rebate System.

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